Prelaw Advisement Information for Freshmen, Sophomores and Juniors

INTRODUCTION

I am available to help you plan your prelaw education and reach reasonable decisions on how, when and where to apply to law school. Although I can guide you, the ultimate responsibility for your professional school planning rests with you. I can explain what a law school education is about, suggest related readings, and provide statistical data and information (at the beginning of your senior year) about the probability of your admission to selected law schools. However, I cannot tell you whether you will enjoy the law, or whether you will be a good lawyer, or whether you will find a job that fulfills your increased expectations upon law school graduation. The answers to these questions depend to a large extent on you.

Your years at Stern are a time to develop management skills and explore the liberal arts. Through your studies you can further develop your study skills and learning ability, and demonstrate expertise in a particular academic discipline. As Stern graduates, you should be able to take advantage of the business skills that you acquired and work in your field of expertise – perhaps for several years before applying to law school. (See page 3.)

This handout is intended to be used together with The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools published by the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) and the Law School Admission Council. The Prelaw Handbook (as it is known in the trade) is revised annually and is the official guide to all American Bar Association approved law schools in the country. In addition to individual law school profiles and entrance requirements, the book offers excellent discussions on law as a career, preparation for law school, the admissions process, the graduate school experience, financing a law school education, and a list of suggested prelaw readings. Students who are entertaining the notion...
of attending law school are strongly urged to read the introductory pages of the Prelaw Handbook. It can be accessed at www.lsac.org.

Random House also publishes some useful prelaw books including Complete Book of Law Schools, Pew-Law Companies and Cracking the LSAT. These books are all in soft cover.

I have prepared graphs showing the pattern of acceptances and rejections made by law schools to which Stern students and alumni have applied over the past four years. These graphs are contained in loose leaf binders in my office. I also have copies of the most recent NAPLA Law School Locator which helps applicants to law school quickly assess the LSAT and GPA expectation of different law schools.

In addition to the reading list contained in the Prelaw Handbook, you should refer to the reading list published by New York University School of Law, which appears at the end of these materials. The School of Law, which is located at 40 Washington Square South (on the southwest corner of the park), permits New York University undergraduates to visit first-year classes at the law school. If you want to know what law school education is all about, go to the law school admissions office, in Room 419 of Vanderbilt Hall, and obtain a copy of its self-guided tour packet, or ask one of the first-year students when and where a lecture on torts, criminal law, contracts or civil procedure is taking place, and find a seat in the rear of the classroom.

In the fall of each year, the LSDAS sponsors a Law School Forum in New York City, as well as in other selected cities throughout the country. This fall the New York Forum will be held at the Hilton New York Hotel located at 1335 Ave of the Americas, on Saturday, October 20 (10 am – 5 pm) and Sunday, October 21 (12 pm – 5 pm). Call (215) 968-1001 or email LSAC at LSACinfo@lsac.org for more information. Representatives from over 160 of the nation’s law schools answer your questions and bring catalogues, bulletins and applications, and the LSDAS provides shopping bags so that you can collect and carry home virtually everything you ever wanted to know about legal education, specific law schools and their admissions criteria.

The American Bar Association’s official guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools includes statistical information on ABA-approved law schools (such as enrollment, LSAT scores, curricula, faculty, career placement, etc.). You can access this information by going to the following LSAC website: http://officialguide.lsac.org/.

For rankings in 10 categories, from admissions to employment, of the law schools in the New York City area link to: http://www.nylj.com.

Finally, one of the best resources for prelaw matters is the Stern Business and Law Association. This student association hosts events, lectures, and programs for prelaw business students. During the fall semester, the association arranges for campus visits by admissions officers of various law schools. You may join the Stern Business Law Association during Fall orientation. For information, please visit SBLA’s website at: www.stern.nyu.edu/~sbla or email the organization at sbla@nyu.edu. You should seriously consider getting involved with this worthwhile student organization.

You should also be aware of the Pre Law Society at the College of Arts and Science. It is a very active and worthwhile organization. The Society’s mailbox is located in the Activities Annex at 21 Washington Place. Ryan Poynter is the current Pre Law Advisor at CAS. He can be reached at the Preprofessional Advisement Office in 901 Silver Building (212-998-8160). Email: ryan.poynter@nyu.edu.

You also can learn about CAS pre-law events by subscribing to lyris@forums.nyu.edu. To subscribe, send the message: Join prelaw first name last name. Messages will be archived on the web for future reference at http://forums.nyu.edu.

On Monday, September 24, 2007, at 12:30pm in Room KMC 1-70, I will be holding a session to introduce myself and generally review and answer your questions relating to the information that is contained in this document. This session will be taped and broadcast online for those students who will be unable to attend.

THE PRELAW CURRICULUM

Many students ask for suggestions in planning a prelaw educational program. At Stern, there is no formal prelaw minor or curriculum and a prelaw student, quite simply, is one who defines himself or herself as such. I do not recommend that you minor in the prelaw program at CAS because law schools do not give any special preference to such a minor.

Although you may intend to go on to law school immediately upon graduation, many students do not apply to law school until years after they have earned their undergraduate degree. Indeed, at the most competitive law schools – such as our own – more than fifty percent of the first year class have been out of school for at least one year. Given the choice, law school admission committees often prefer more mature and experienced applicants. If you have any doubt about going to law school, wait. Do something else – work, travel. There is no “track” from which you are going to be derailed.

As graduates of a fine business school, you will have opportunities to apply what you studied here in jobs of your choice (such as accounting, financial services, investment banking, management, etc.). Don’t blindly rush off to law school without first giving these opportunities a chance.
As Stern juniors, you will be required to take Law, Business and Society. Stern recognizes that all business people need to have a footing in law. If you major in accounting, you will also be required to take Law for Accountants and Other Professionals.

Stern endorses the viewpoint of the AALS that a single, “best” prelaw curriculum cannot be identified. You should concentrate in those academic areas which most hold your interest – the fields most likely to motivate you. Law schools do not prefer any specific major. Most schools recommend that students perfect their skills in English composition. Words are the tools of a lawyer and the student who can express himself or herself with confidence and clarity will be at a distinct advantage. Beginning with the Freshman Expository Writing Program, you should be concentrating on developing writing skills to the utmost. The importance of verbal skills cannot be overstated, and the development of the ability to express oneself forcefully and accurately, both orally and in writing, is at the heart of the legal profession.

Given the above, it is possible to sketch those areas which are most suitable for eventual prelegal studies. First, since verbal expression is at the heart of the profession, courses which require extensive reading, writing, and research should be taken. These are in liberal arts and business. Second, the precision of methodology and thought required in mathematics, computers, logic and the natural sciences will aid in the development of analytic skills. Third, a background in the behavioral sciences and humanities – politics, history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology – is suggested since each will offer critical understanding of human intuitions and values with which the law deals. Understanding basic economic and business principles is of increasing importance in law school classroom analysis. Even non-business majors are being urged to take business courses. Obviously, if you are thinking of practicing international law or in a bilingual or ethnic community, you should study the language and culture of the regions that hold appeal. International business courses will be helpful as well.

The courses listed below appear with some regularity in the College of Arts & Science curriculum. Please note that the courses change from year to year and semester by semester, so consult the Fall and Spring bulletin to familiarize yourself with current offerings.

- **Anthropology**: Human Rights and Anthropology
- **History**: History of Ancient Law
- **Journalism**: Media and the Law; Media Ethics, Law and the Public Interest
- **Liberal Studies**: Law and Literature
- **Metropolitan Studies**: Criminal Processes in NYC, Law and Urban Problems, Legal Internships
- **Philosophy**: Philosophy of Law
- **Politics**: American Constitution, Civil Liberties, Congress and Legislative Assemblies, Law and Administrative Regulations, Law and Society, Women and the Law
- **Psychology**: Psychology and the Law
- **Sociology**: Criminology, Law and Society, Lawyers: Careers and Work, Juvenile Delinquency, Sociology of Law
- **Women’s Studies**: Law and Society, Women and the Law
Keep in mind that most law schools actively discourage students from taking too many law-related classes as undergraduates. Law is based upon sets of fundamental principles which are reflected in basic fields such as contracts, torts, criminal law, property, constitutional law, and civil procedure. These courses are most often taught in the first year of law school. Most law students do not fully comprehend what legal education is about until they are well into their study of these subjects. Elective second and third year courses are based upon basic principles learned in the first year. The Stern undergraduate student taking a variety of law-related courses cannot hope to achieve an ordered understanding of legal fundamentals. Students who overload on such courses may, upon entering law school, mistakenly believe they have achieved a head start. In short, while law-related courses may help you decide whether law is a field which interests you and may familiarize you with a new vocabulary, it is debatable whether undergraduate law courses will help you get into law school or measurably help you once you are there.

GRADES

It would be hypocritical to address curricular choices without addressing the issue of grades. Like it or not, grades – together with your score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) – play a critical part in the admissions process. How should this affect your choice of courses? Ideally, not at all, but realistically it is better to take 16 credits and get A’s and B’s than to get C’s with 20 credits. Law schools will receive a copy of your transcript, and admissions officers know from experience which disciplines are rigorous, which departments have strong academic reputations, and which courses have high and low curves. They also recognize when a student is systematically padding the transcript to achieve a higher grade point average.

If you are avoiding a course because it is difficult, or you are uncertain whether a particular subject will interest you, take the risk. In the first place, one poor grade has never kept anyone out of even the most competitive law school, and secondly, you should be willing to explore. You may find that once you are exposed to unfamiliar territory, it may become an exciting academic interest.

Finally, my advice to major in a field which holds your interest has particular relevance with respect to grades. If you are enjoying what you are doing, the result will be better marks.

WITHDRAWALS AND THE PASS/FAIL OPTION

Most admissions committees have what are best described as mixed emotions about the pass/fail option. Although committees sympathize with the notion that pass/fail grading may give a student the opportunity to take a course that he or she would otherwise not, committees also feel that the more of such marks on a transcript, the less information they have on which to base their judgment on your qualifications as an applicant. One of the consequences of a permanent record laden with pass/fail credits is that increasingly greater weight is placed on your LSAT score. Similarly, you should avoid withdrawing from courses whenever possible. This does not mean that you should never withdraw from a course, but series of withdrawals over several semesters carries strong negative implications, from an attempt to manipulate the grade point average, to an inability to finish what you have started. Since most law schools have prescribed first year curricula, admissions committees look warily upon undergraduate students who fail to complete a term’s
expected course load. You also should keep in mind that if you decide to apply to law school in your senior year, the admission’s decision is likely to be based upon your first three years (six semesters) of academic work.

IS THE LAW FOR ME? THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Although law school, like college, can lead to a variety of occupations and one student’s experience can be quite different from another’s, virtually all accredited law schools share the common and specialized objective of training people to become lawyers (not investment bankers, not motion picture executives, etc.). This professional orientation is reflected in the similarity of different law schools’ curricula as well as in a common attitude among students, all of whom, at least during the first year, are taking the same courses. Each is anxious to master the fundamental skills and labors hard to achieve that end. While law school is not necessarily more difficult intellectually than college, the workload tends to be substantially greater and the level of competency demanded by professors is uniformly higher. Since everyone is studying the same materials, each with a desire to master skills certain to be required in a legal career, students in law schools usually are faced with a heightened sense of competition.

The first year is devoted to a process of re-education, since law schools see themselves as teaching people to “think like lawyers.” Students are forced to think critically and precisely and to articulate their ideas with clarity and conviction. Although its dominance has declined in recent years, the Socratic method remains the principal tool in this educational process. The Socratic method entails rapidly paced questions and answers – a give-and-take session in the classroom setting – which are designed to teach students how to analyze and synthesize into a coherent framework the raw materials of the common law. A law professor will rarely explain precisely what the rule of law is in a particular case or area, often because it is impossible to do so. Instead, the students are expected to develop and organize their own understanding of the shape and trend in precedent as they digest hundreds of appellate judicial decisions. Daily classes, as well as examinations (which are in essay form requiring legal analysis of a factual hypothetical situation and usually offered once in each course at the end of the semester), require extensive reading and preparation. Accomplishment, however, depends far more upon skill at rapid analysis and articulation than upon memory and regurgitation.

In addition to the traditional “casebook” courses that typify legal education, most first-year students participate in legal writing or “lawyering” courses, which may include “moot court” programs. These provide an introduction to the essential skills of research, preparation of memoranda, briefs, and other legal documents, as well as to negotiation, conflict resolution, and oral advocacy. In the second and third years, students select from a variety of traditional casebook courses that further enhance basic skills while providing substantive familiarity with more specialized areas of law, e.g. taxation, evidence, corporations, family law, environmental law, labor law. Most schools also offer seminars in a variety of disciplines such as legal philosophy, as well as clinical programs that enable students to pursue specialized interests and perform legal tasks under clinical professors’ supervision. Indeed, clinical and “cooperative” programs have become increasingly important tools in legal education and many students choose a law school based upon the variety and reputation of an institution’s clinical offerings.
Experience outside the classroom is as vital to legal education – especially to second and third year students – as formal coursework. Law students learn as much from their peers (usually in close-knit study groups) as from their professors; many extracurricular activities in law school revolve around student-run projects in legal education and advocacy. On the academic side, most law schools have advanced programs in moot court; of even greater import are student publications, such as the law review, that offer legal scholarship in periodical form. On a more practical level, many students participate in organizations that provide legal assistance or research to the elderly, to indigents, to prison inmates, and to other groups at the center of social and political controversy.

As mentioned earlier, if you really want to know what a law school course is all about, sit in on one at our law school. The New York University School of Law allows NYU undergraduates to visit any of the first year course lectures in torts, contracts, criminal law or civil procedure. If you want to find out when and where a particular course is being taught, ask a first year law student, or check with the admissions office in D’Agostino Hall, 100 West 3rd Street, Lobby Level (212-998-6060). Obtaining “hands on” experience through an internship in the legal field is an excellent way to determine if a career in law is for you. Undergraduates have served as interns in the courts, government agencies, legal public interest agencies, and law firms. The Wasserman Center for Career Development (133 E. 13th Street, 2nd Floor, btwn 3rd & 4th Avenues) lists internships (paid, non-paid, and for-credit) for all NYU students on Career Net (http://www.nyu.edu/careerdevelopment/careernet_login.php). Internships are updated daily with current positions for the fall, spring and summer. Call to schedule an appointment with a career counselor at (212) 998-4730.

To learn first-hand about a variety of legal areas, register for the mentoring program. This program, administered by Career Development, allows students to benefit from professional experiences of NYU alumni who are practicing attorneys. The program offers role models, job-shadowing, contacts, and networking opportunities. Call Career Development at (212) 998-4730 to obtain more information.

To see if “law” generally fits your interests, skills, career goals and education, try Career Services’ Sigi Plus computer program. This program gives descriptions and other desired information on occupations, as well as on law schools.

Another crosscheck for your interest in law may be to test your tolerance for ambiguity. To the layman, law appears to be an extremely precise field. Something is clearly right or wrong, legal or illegal. Yet any law student or lawyer can tell you that law is full of “ifs,” “buts,” and “maybes.” It is not a world of black and white, but of murky shadows and shades of gray, and interpretation, analysis, and even competence in the courtroom may depend on your ability to stay afloat in an ocean of ambiguity. If you are the kind of person who likes precision and exactness, then you might think twice about a career in law.

For students motivated by idealistic or humanitarian interests, the long hours and hard work devoted to learning and legal fundamentals may seem (and sometimes are) irrelevant to long term goals. A law student must learn every aspect of the law, regardless of specific career plans. If you are interested in human rights law, or civil liberties, you must be willing to learn a great deal about contracts, torts, civil procedure, corporate law, and taxation. Similarly, while many prelaw students
embrace the idea of a legal career because of a personal antipathy towards numbers, e.g. mathematics, economics, and the sciences, you should remember that lawyers are most often called upon to deal with conflict, and that since most conflict is financial (even in divorce cases), the horror of numbers cannot be avoided. You should be familiar with accounting principles and know how to read a balance sheet, even if you are working for the National Resources Defense Council and are attempting to save a pristine Alaskan forest. Law school is a long, arduous, and sometimes monotonously indirect route that will eventually enable you to acquire tools you will need to effectively represent any individual or group, from the largest corporation to a dispossessed tenement tenant in need of legal aid.

LAW AS A CAREER

One hurdle remains after graduation from law school before most students are qualified lawyers: passing the bar examination. Bar exams are administered by individual states to license those who wish to practice in their jurisdiction. Most law students enroll in a six- or eight-week “bar review” course given in the state in which they intend to practice soon after graduating from law school.

These are changing times in the legal profession. A law degree does not provide a guarantee of legal employment. Also, many lawyers complain that the hours they put into their work rob them of a satisfactory private life. While it is impossible as an undergraduate to be absolutely certain of just what one wants to do with adulthood and how one wants to earn a living, given the high cost of law school and possible future downside employment trends, one should be fairly committed to the calling of law before embarking on a legal education.

The cost of legal education is extraordinary and many students do not realize how much of a debt burden they are taking on. In 1999, the average indebtedness of a law school graduate was $55,000 (not including the debt students owe for their undergraduate education). Since then the average cost of debt has continued to increase dramatically. As is true of all averages or means, the numbers also masquerade the significant differences in debt levels between students attending public-supported state law schools and those who attend private law schools. Not surprisingly, some of the highest debt levels are incurred by students attending private law schools in the greater New York City region.

Given the data, you should think seriously about how dedicated you are to securing a legal education and practicing law. There will always be room for one or more good lawyer, particularly someone who views law as a helping, serving profession, and where the undertaking, as in medicine, is regarded as more of a calling than a business. These are the people who tend to be the most satisfied with the practice of law. If you have any doubts about just why you are going to law school or you are doing it at the last minute or on a whim, put it off for a year or two and try something else, whatever holds your interest. Or, you might try to find work as a paralegal in a law firm or governmental office to better acquaint yourself with what it is lawyers actually do. Given today’s marketplace and the cost of legal education, the decision to attend law school can no longer be taken lightly or undertaken just to broaden one’s knowledge.

The tendency of most graduating law students to enter private or government practice should be recognized by those who are considering law school as an avenue to a non-legal career. While it is
true that a law degree can lead to a variety of occupations, most law students become lawyers in the private sector, and even those who pursue “non-traditional careers” often begin their quest with several years of active practice. The mere fact that you have a law degree will not lead you to a top management position on Wall Street or in Hollywood, and given the expense of a legal education, you might be better served with an M.B.A. degree or the experience of working at an entry-level position in your non-legal field of interest upon graduation from Stern. The National Association of Law Placement offers worthwhile information on this subject. Visit its website at www.nalp.org.

Many students whose experience has been limited to academic situations find it difficult to determine whether law will be a suitable career for them. There are several ways to explore the option of law school, academically and through practical experience. As an undergraduate, you may want to enroll in one or two law-oriented courses to test your interest in the study of law. Some may use as texts the same casebooks used by law schools, but most will be taught in traditional undergraduate format. In addition to the required Stern course entitled Law, Business and Society, there are several other law-related courses offered at Stern including Law for Accountants and Other Professionals and Entertainment Law. Also, CAS offers courses that expose students to legal topics. They change from year to year and semester by semester, so be certain to consult the CAS Bulletin as well as the Fall and Spring Master Lists to discern current offerings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

The under-representation of minority groups in the legal profession has been a longstanding and serious problem in this country. For this reason for the past thirty years, law schools have been actively recruiting minority applicants and have established policies to assure that qualified candidates are given the opportunity for a legal education. This remains true today despite several United States Supreme Court decisions that do not fully support these policies.

If you are a minority student, it is wise to be well-informed of the opportunities available. You should make certain to identify yourself as a member of a minority group at the time you register for the LSAT and with the LSDAS. This will enable interested law schools to contact you through the Candidate Referral Service. Thereafter, you might wish to contact minority student organizations at the law schools you are considering. It will be to your advantage to discuss your interests and applications with members of these organizations since in some instances they will track your application and may have a part in the admission decision. These students can also inform you of any special problems or special advantages for minority students at their particular school.

Each year, the Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) helps economically and educationally disadvantaged students enter law school. This is achieved through a summer institute program designed to introduce college graduates to the study of law. Information on CLEO is available from law school admissions offices or from CLEO’s national office at 740 15th Street, NW, 9th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005 or call (toll free) 866-886-4343 or (local) 202-216-4343. Their website: http://www.cleoscholars.com.
A FINAL NOTE…

Once again, early in your undergraduate career, I urge you to read the Prelaw Handbook (the Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools), its suggested reading list, and our own law school’s list of prelaw readings. Most students wait until they are actually applying to law school before consulting these materials. I also encourage you to join the Stern Business and Law Association.

Law schools base their admission decision on a variety of factors. Most importantly, your LSAT score and your grade point average will place you within the “ball park” of a particular law school’s admission criteria, but beyond the “numbers,” admissions officers attempt to create a diverse student body comprised of interesting individuals. You can distinguish yourself by participating in extracurricular activities, by involving yourself in the community in which you live, and by getting to know faculty with whom you are studying and whom you will eventually call upon to write letters of recommendation. When you are ready to begin the application process, usually in the spring semester of your junior year, you should obtain the materials you will need to register for the LSAT and with the LSDAS. Also, you should obtain a copy of my GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL, a detailed outline of the steps to follow during the specific year’s application period.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

Reading

Frequently I am asked for suggested reading about the study and practice of law or for a list of books a student might read before beginning the formal study of law. Thus I have included such a list here for those who do wish to read more about law during the upcoming months. Reading widely will, of course, serve you as well in law as in life, and I include this list not because I think that you should read these – or any other – particular books before entering law school, but to help those of you who want some direction.

My list is very short, because it is intended only as a starting place and because many of the books included have fairly extensive bibliographies

Books about Applying to and Going to Law School


Guide to the Law Schools, Barrons Publications.

The Best Law Schools, Princeton Review.

Complete Book of Law Schools, Random House.
Cracking the LSAT, Random House.

Law School Companion, Random House.

Pre-Law Companion, Random House.

Perspectives on Career Services. NALP, January 2004. (www.nalp.org)


Crane, Eileen. The Other Side of the Desk: What I Wish My Pre-law Advisor Told Me.

Deaver, Jeff, The Complete Law School Companion, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Dobbyn, John F., So You Want to Go to Law School, West Publishing, Co.


Martinson, Thomas and David Waldherr, Getting into Law School: Strategies for the 90’s, ARCO Press.

Montauk, Richard. How to Get into the Top Law Schools.

Owens, Eric. Law School Essays that Made a Difference.

Roth, George. Slaying the Law School Dragon, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
Siegal, Brian, *How to Succeed in Law School*, Barrons Educational Series, Inc.


Stewart, Mark. *Perfect Personal Statements*.


Walton, Kimm Alayne, J.D. *What Law School Doesn’t Teach You... But You Really Need to Know*. 2000. (www.nalp.org)


**Books about the Legal Profession**


**References**

Strunk and White. *The Elements of Style*.

*Black’s Law Dictionary*.

*The New York Times* (or other daily newspaper)

*Court TV* or [www.courttv.com](http://www.courttv.com)

**Suggestions for History Books:**

- Berkin, Carol et al. *Making America*.
- Jenkins, Philip. *A History of the United States*.
- Tindall & Shi. *America: A Narrative History*.

**Beach reading about the Law**

Harr, Jonathan. *A Civil Action*.


Miller, Robert. *Law School Confidential*.

**Videos/DVDs**

- Legally Blonde (the original)
- The Paper Chase
- Erin Brockovich
- My Cousin Vinny
- Any John Grisham movie (or book)

Other useful websites:
- [http://thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov) (Federal legislative info & links to Federal agencies, historical documents, branches of government, and state/local gov. sites.)
- [http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm](http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm) (State and local government info)
- [www.medill.northwestern.edu/docket/cases/srch](http://www.medill.northwestern.edu/docket/cases/srch) (Supreme Court docket)
- [http://supct.law.cornell.edu](http://supct.law.cornell.edu) (Case and Topic Research)
- [www.usenews.com](http://www.usenews.com) (provides Career Guide, law links, annual rankings, articles)
  [www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com) (general pre-law and LSAT information)